

the birds Col. Schomberg saw were *Podoces pleskei*, the Persian Ground Chough, but definite proof in the shape of a skin is needed before this bird can be added to the *Fauna of British India* (Stuart Baker).

If this note should catch the eye of any member of the Society in Baluchistan who has the opportunity of securing a specimen of this rare bird, I hope he will make every effort to obtain a skin (no matter how imperfect), and forward it to the Bombay Natural History Society. There is a description and plate of this bird by Bowdler Sharpe in Vol. xvii of the Society's *Journal*, pp. 555-557. But since it is not always easy to gain access to this volume, I append the following field identifications:—

In desert areas where there are a few tamarisk bushes, look out for a cinnamon coloured bird, about the size of a hoopoe, with a black tail and throat, and black and white wings, which can run swiftly over sand hills, and perches occasionally on bushes.

C/o POSTMASTER,  
SRINAGAR, KASHMIR,  
December 23, 1944.

F. LUDLOW.

#### 8.—SUNBIRDS AND FLOWERS

With reference to the flowers identified by you as *Hamelia patens* Jacq. in which I observed the Purple-Sunbird taking short-cuts to the nectar, I would like to add the following from my notes:—

March 26, 1944. Both male and female came near the nest, the female feeding on the Tecoma flowers. Neither bird, incidentally, sticks its beak up the centre of the flower, but makes an incision near the base of the trumpet, without harming the stamens, as far as the naked eye can see.

To this, I would add the further points:—

(a) So far I have only observed the male following the alternative method of hovering with rapidly vibrating wings and feeding off both the Tecoma (in March-April) and *Hamelia patens* (August-September); I have never seen the female hover.

(b) So far I have only seen the male using the 'short-cut' method on *Hamelia patens*, though there is no reason to suppose the female would not do so too.

While writing the above paragraph, the male sunbird arrived on *Hamelia patens*. Watching feeding operations from 8 yards through glasses, it seems clear enough that the method of tackling the flower depends entirely on how it can best be reached from the branch the bird is perched on. If the flower is on the same level, he sticks his beak right up it to the base of the mandibles; if the flower is on a lower level with the aperture facing away from him, he uses the 'short-cut' method, gauging the distance along the flower up which his beak would reach; if he cannot reach a flower from his perch even by the 'short-cut' method, he has to leave his perch and hover vigorously in front of it.

MAYO COLLEGE, AJMER.  
September 18th, 1944.

J. A. M. EDE.

[Short-cuts by birds to the nectar of flowers is well known in the case of numerous species of flowers and many species of birds. A note on the subject by N. K. Tiwary is published in Vol. XXXII of the *Journal* (p. 378). Further references to the habit will be found in 'Flower Birds and Bird Flowers in India' by Salim Ali (*ibid.* Vol. XXXV, pp. 573).—Eds.]

#### 9.—PLAINTIVE CUCKOO (?) PARASITISING PURPLE SUN-BIRD.

I have just seen a queer sight, namely, a purple-rumped sun-bird's nest tenanted by a young cuckoo, probably the 'plaintive'. This monster baby almost overflows from the nest and is fed not only by the sunbirds but also by tailor birds. They seem to take it in turns.

I suppose this case is rather a freak as one would not expect a bird of this size to select one of the tiniest species as foster parents for its offspring.

The nest is in the garden of Major Nabi Khan, next door to the Turf Club.

POONA,  
August 30th, 1944.

M. F. SUTER, D.SC.

[As far as we are aware, this is the first instance recorded (presuming our contributor's identification to be correct, as seems likely) of a Plaintive Cuckoo cuckolding the nest of a sunbird. The tailor bird and wren warblers, which also build purse-like nests are of course well known dupes. The smaller Emerald and Violet Cuckoos (*Chalcites*) of the Himalayas and Assam are regularly parasitic on various sunbirds.

The Himalayan Cuckoo (*C. c. optatus*) and the Asiatic Cuckoo *C. c. telephonus* in the Himalayas (as well as the Khasia Hills Cuckoo (*C. c. bakeri* in Assam) frequently lay in the dome shaped nests of tiny birds, e.g., the Grey-headed Flycatcher-Warbler (*Seicercus xanthoschistos*) out of which the young imposter can only emerge by bursting the fabric which surrounds it as tightly as a straight jacket.

The most interesting part of the note, perhaps, is that the baby cuckoo was being fed while still *within* the nest by both tailor bird and sunbird. Young birds *outside* the nest and begging for food have frequently been recorded being fed by birds of different species.—Eds.).

#### 10.—'ALPINE SWIFTS' ON RAMESWARAM ISLAND?

On page 247 in *J.B.N.H.S.* Vol. XI, Mr. Biddulph in 'The Birds or Rameswaram Island' says of the Alpine Swift-*Micropus melba bakeri* (Hartert):—

' . . . The numbers increase from December to March when parties of from twenty to forty may often be seen seated on the telegraph wires alongside the railway line.'